

1863

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Letter

Pamphlet Box, B2

LETTER

FROM

His Grace the Archbishop of Halifax,

TO

HENRY J. CLARKE, Esq., Q. C.,

ON THE

CLAIMS OF T. D'ARCY MCGEE, Esq.,

(M. P. for Montreal West,)

TO THE

CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT

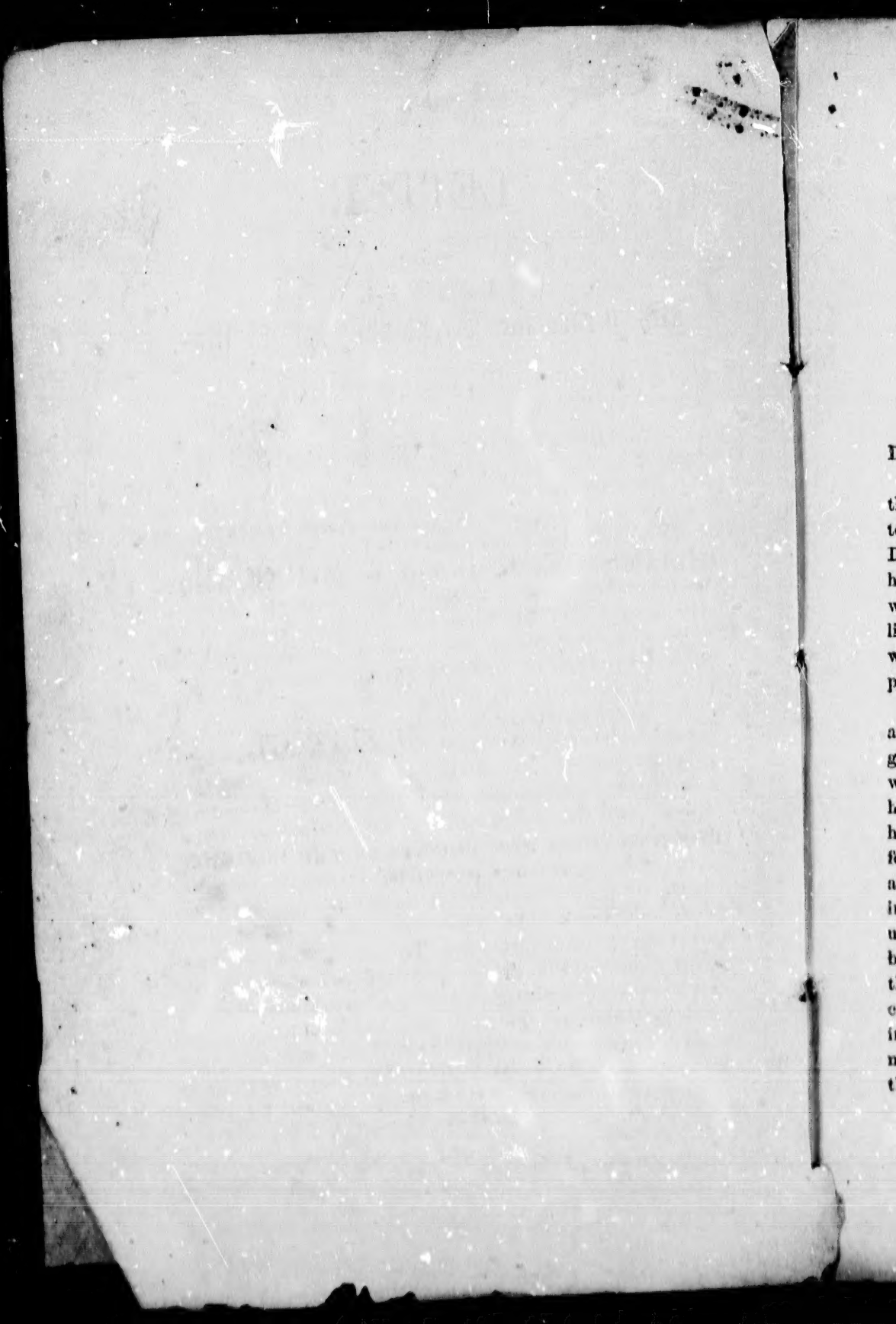
OF THE

IRISH AND THEIR DESCENDANTS IN THE DOMINION
OF CANADA.

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LETTER.

ST. MARY'S, HALIFAX,

JULY 22ND, 1867.

DEAR SIR:—

At a crisis like the present, when the election of Members for the House of Commons in the new Dominion of Canada is about to take place, I feel it a duty to address you, as Secretary of Mr. D'Arcy McGee's Election Committee, and at a distance of eight hundred miles, to raise my humble voice in behalf of an Irishman, who, under a kind Providence, has been mainly instrumental in lifting up his fellow countrymen and co-religionists to a position which, I believe in my heart, they never yet attained in this or perhaps in any other country.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee, as an individual, may have his faults and his shortcomings—from which no mere human being, however great and good, can be entirely exempt; but as a public man, whose career I have narrowly watched with deepest interest since he first touched the soil of Canada, I unhesitatingly say that he has earned for himself a loftier public character, and has done more for the real honor and advantage of Catholics and Irishmen, here and elsewhere, than any other I know of since the days of the immortal O'Connell. During the dark period of his brief misunderstanding with Archbishop Hughes in New York, that brightest and best of Ireland's sons in America declared to myself that "McGee had the biggest mind, and was unquestionably the cleverest man and the greatest orator, that Ireland had sent forth in modern times." To this I heartily subscribed then, when I had not even the advantage of a personal acquaintance; and now, at this critical moment, I do it the more earnestly, with the unmis-

takeable retrospect before me of his brilliant and almost faultless public career in this country, which stamps him for all time to come, and beyond all competition, as our best and representative Irishman. If I were asked to whom above all others I would wish to entrust the advocacy of Ireland's cause, I should say, without a moment's hesitancy, that that man was Thomas D'Arcy McGee, the ex-Minister of Canada.

To his intellectual supremacy I would add one other quality, which is the crowning of all in a public man, and that is, a high-souled patriotism, which, amid the rubbish of popular clap-traps, and the ever tortuous eddies of unthinking and passionate love of country tiding on to ruin, made him rather seek, on all occasions, the hidden gem of truth, and advocate all that was sound in policy, despite the clamor of the crowd in whose behoof he was putting forth, at the risk of their displeasure, his gigantic strength. There is not on record anything more manly or more heroic than the culminating phase of the great career of O'Connell, who, brought up in the school of adversity, and warned by the experience of a long and chequered life, spent his last years, and, I may say, expired with hands uplifted against madmen, "who loved their country indeed, but loved it not wisely but too well." The God of wisdom and of truth tells us to judge of the tree by its fruits, and every man by his works. Guided by this heavenly criterion, what, I ask, has become of all the phantom schemes of physical force, without possibility of success, which this prince of Irishmen—this purest and wisest and bravest of patriots, never ceased to denounce during his whole life? What has become of Young Irelandism, and the Phœnix Society, and the Brothers of St. Patrick, and more modern Fenianism, with all the glittering mirrors of a fanciful avenir, and the fascinating promises of a triumph, which, with the means at hand, no man in right mind could have hoped to see realized? Have they kept their word? have they fulfilled their engagements? have they emancipated their country, or made a single step in advance? have they given to the world a proof of their wisdom to plan, and ability to overcome all obstacles, and bring their arduous undertaking to a triumphant consummation? Now that all is over (as I sincerely

hope, for Ireland's sake), can they confront any intelligent man, and say in honor, like the men of the Southern Confederacy, that if they did not succeed, they were at least very near success; that they deserved it, and would have certainly triumphed, but for unforeseen circumstances, which no human forecast could have provided for? With the man who says No! to all this, I wish to have no further argument. Hundreds of high-sounding speeches were made—the spirits of patriots, who are now no more—the martyred dead, and a thousand phantoms, were conjured up; tens of thousands swore they would do the deed, and they did it not, and for the very obvious reason that Mr. McGee and my humble self, and all the Bishops and Priests in Ireland and America, and every intelligent and respectable man, clearly foresaw and announced beforehand,—and the reason is, that it was simply impossible.

The very first elements of success were not taken into account in the programme. There was not a distant approach to equality in the number and resources of the two parties that were to do battle. There was first but sheer madness in the plan, and then there was no blending of sentiment—no unity of action among the millions—no genius to call it forth, and no leaders of undoubted character and ability (without which no cause ever yet succeeded) to guide and develop it, and give it force and efficacy for the mighty object in view. It failed, therefore, as it was bound to fail, and as nearly all sensible and respectable men in Ireland and America clearly foresaw,—and oh! let me here appeal to every Irishman that has a heart, and to the good and thinking of every land: What are the results at the present hour of these successive failures? Have these misguided men, well-meaning as they may be,—have they struck off the fetters from a single limb? Have they bettered the condition of Ireland in any manner? Have they emancipated her Helots or removed a single grievance? Have they fed the hungry or covered the naked, or gladdened the fireside of a single hut in the poor land that gave them birth? Have they in any respect exalted the character of the country, and her brave, and good, and faithful, and patriotic people in the eyes of the world? No, alas! the very reverse is true. Instead of building up a solid foundation,

and fostering a national spirit, and grouping men together as O'Connell did, thereby strengthening their own hands, they kicked their only platform from under, and sapped the basis itself. They began by attacking the stronghold of the sanctuary, and the grey-haired and unflinching champions of a faith and patriotism in Ireland, which England herself sought in vain to uproot; and they tried to tear to pieces a liberty charter from God, bequeathed to them in spite of centuries of persecution by nobler and more patriotic sires.

They began by separating the flock from the pastor, and splitting up the people—their only element of power. They detached all that was enlightened, and patriotic, and noble in the land. They cooled their friends, and encouraged rather than scared their enemies. They brought poverty, and gaunt famine, and terror, and misery of every kind on the country, and drenched its soil with Irish Catholic blood. They filled the prisons of Britain and Canada with hundreds of Irish victims—some of the truest children of her soil—whose chains, and heart writhings, and maledictions, at this moment cry vengeance against those who made their homes a hell in this world, and consigned them during the remainder of their lives to a fate far more horrible than death. They have, in the language of the distinguished Cardinal Archbishop of Dublin, brought wailing, and tears, and bitter anguish to hundreds of once happy homes, and turned out vast numbers of widows and orphans as beggars on a merciless world. And is there no one, I will ask, to be responsible before God and man for these heart-rending disasters? Is there no man with courage and honesty enough to bring them before the bar of outraged public opinion, and to arraign, in the face of any amount of clamor and maudlin sentimentality, the guilty perpetrators of the foulest crimes that have ever been committed against Ireland and her nationality, and her honor, and the dearest and most vital interests of her people? It is the leaders, but not their true-hearted though frenzied followers, who are to blame. Where are these leaders at the present hour? Have they really proved their patriotism when the crisis came? Have they shared the toil, and heat, and labor, and danger of the day of struggle, with their comrades in arms? Have they

been struck down with them by the bullets of the same foe, and do they now sleep calmly like Maximilian in Mexico, and the men of the South, side by side with the patriot soldiers that fell on the same field? Do they carry the same shackles, linked together in the same prison with those who proved their heroism, and who, true as steel, certainly merited a better fate? No! If the truth were known—and it is known—instead of sharing in the disasters of Ireland and the fate of her ill-guided though bravest children, the real leaders are sharing at this moment the spoils of a big-hearted but a plundered and deluded people. One or two years since a man of very commonplace ability and of no character whatever, might have earned any amount of Irish popularity by a similar process. All he need do was to make a high-sounding speech, without mincing matters. He should deal largely in Irish grievances, with fire, and thunder, and vengeance, as his stock in trade, and bid defiance in his own person—always, mark you, carefully kept away from danger—and he becomes hero and chieftain, and any other grand personage you may please to call him from that hour. A man with the towering ability of D'Arcy McGee had but to hold his tongue and preserve an ominous and significant silence, whilst in Canada as in Ireland his fellow-countrymen were blindly marching on to inevitable destruction, and amid senseless and rabid men his patriotism might be insured at a small premium, and his popularity endure like that of O'Mahoney, and Roberts, and Stevens; but throughout British America, as in Ireland, men of all other creeds and nationalities would shout traitor! and the blood, the whitened bones, and the devastated homesteads of Irishmen, and the wailing and tears of Irish women and orphans in this now happy land, would bring malediction and cry shame upon him as the author of their unparalleled misfortunes. The great majority who are in a far better and happier position here than elsewhere, might, no doubt, pursue the safer and more prudent course; but if Mr. McGee—the Daniel O'Connell of this country—had not fearlessly come forward at the critical moment with genuine Irishry and true patriotism at heart, and electrify the country by his matchless eloquence: who is the man now living that could have foretold the consequences for Irishmen, and, above all, for Irish

Catholics in British America? Like the unseen match, it might not have been heeded at the moment, nor the real danger understood by many to the present day; but if that match had been once ignited, and that D'Arcy McGee had not been on the watchtowers when all others were asleep, I, as an Irish Catholic Archbishop, yielding to no man in my love for my fellow-countrymen and my co-religionists at home or abroad, I distinctly state that in my conviction, far as Irishmen and Catholics in this country are concerned, it would have infallibly ended in nothing short of a disastrous conflagration. The single action of Mr. McGee in this instance has been of more signal service to Irishmen and their true interests in the new Dominion of Canada, than what has been achieved by all others besides. If our creed or country were threatened or assailed by any enemy within or without, on whom else have we to fall back at this moment? There may be men equally or more clever, but where are they or were they for the last twelve years, when Ireland and Catholicity required a defender inside and outside of Parliament? It may be said that a better and more talented generation is rising up. But in my mind that not only remains to be proved, but is improbable in the highest degree; and granting, for the sake of argument, it were certain, most assuredly these newer and brighter lights ought to have procured a candlestick for themselves in another sphere. Before shedding even one genial ray of their own illumination, they certainly should not extinguish the lamp that so far has lighted us on to victory and to honor.

Besides, this novel and hideous mode of action is by no means in keeping with the traditional gratitude of Irishmen the world over, and their proverbial and unflinching fidelity to old and well tried friends. There was a time when it could not be said of them as of the old Roman Plebs, that they were "*novarum rerum cupidi*," fond of new things and new comers, and that they bowed down in homage to the rising sun on each succeeding morning. Such a system would be dishonorable to them as a people as it would be disastrous to their best interests. The day must soon come when the potent spell of McGee's oratory will be again indispensably needed by the Irish and by Catholics in the new House of Commons, and when his

absence would be sadly felt and deplored by tens of thousands, whose hearts throb in unison with mine for the same cause. Others more or less qualified may be substituted in his stead, but the man must be bold indeed who will assume his mantle and the responsibility of his functions before the eyes of an expectant public, and who for the time being will occupy the niche which nature seems to have carved out for him above all others. For my own part, I see no such man in British America, nor do I know at present the individual of whom such hopes can be reasonably entertained.

The records of his long and public services in Canada, and the prestige of his name, have not only raised him up to an eminence not accessible to others, but they have secured for Irishmen and Catholics in this country a position which, without him, in my conviction, they could have never obtained. About the causes that led to his withdrawal from the New Government, I know nothing; but if Mr. McGee, or one like him, had not made his mark, and that his influence were not felt and acknowledged from end to end of the land, the Irish Catholic element, I fear, might not have been required in the formation of the new Ministry, and seven hundred thousand helots would be practically unrepresented in the Executive at Ottawa, as millions of the same creed and caste now are in Washington, where no McGee—no Irish Catholic—has ever yet thundered in their legislative halls. For this distinguished service, I, as one deeply interested in everything Catholic and Irish, take this public occasion of gratefully recognizing the fact. I deeply regret, for reasons which I, as a stranger to Canadian politics cannot comprehend, that Mr. McGee himself is not in the Ministry. But in his withdrawal from so high a position, and in the fact that the Government deemed it expedient to have him replaced by another gentleman of the highest respectability, and of the same origin and creed, I see the evidences of the improved position which the Irish Catholic body holds in the public opinion of the country, and I admire the magnanimity of the man who now retires from the seat of honor with a grace and a self-denial which make it the crowning act of his whole public life.

It was Napoleon, I believe, who invariably asked, when hearing of a great man, What did he do? It was not his genius, learning, or patriotism, he cared for; nor what he said, nor what grand speeches, or promises, or professions he made. No! It was invariably what he did. That was the question, the answer to which solved every problem in his mind. It is not the power that slumbers, but it is power brought into action and tested by results—it is indomitable will, and holy ambition, and energy, and industry, and high sense of honor and honesty, and the spirit of sacrifice, and a big heart, that makes the man of great intellectual power truly great in all the width of that expression. If the life of Mr. McGee were not one of sleepless industry, and if, with all his faults, he had not ardently loved Ireland, and laboured for her (as few ever did) from earliest youth—if he had not energy and honesty enough to make great sacrifices whenever her interests required them, like thousands of little-gifted and half-witted and self-belauded patriots of mushroom growth, with which our country swarms, he would have hummed away his petty life like the drone—he would shine but as the ephemeral lightning that flashes but to disappear, and leave no streak behind. By the mere tricks and claptrops of stump oratory, he would have risen up in the esteem and enthusiasm of the unthinking and the vulgar, but to hopelessly sink back to the native obscurity from which he sprung. Moreover, patriotism is often but the hypocritical cloak of the trader in mere human passion, who, leech-like, but delights to fatten on the diseased blood of his victims. With “liberty and people’s rights” inscribed on their banner, and the ever-hackneyed shibboleth of “Down with the traitor” on their lips, the demagogue and the brawler have invariably proved themselves, when in power, the most unrelenting despots. In the sacred name of Liberty, from the earliest ages, they have committed more crimes against the world and humanity, than all other malefactors together.

“Oh, Liberty, Liberty! what crimes have been committed in thy name!”

As there is no crime so black, no vice so insidious, as that which dons the garb of heavenly virtue, and smiles as it stabs, so patriotism made to order, is the ever-ready weapon of the wicked and

designing. It is but the stepping-stone of the dwarf, the short cut of the pigmy to grandeur, the high road of the dullard to a popularity fitful as the winds of heaven. If you but listen the while the true ring of the genuine metal is never to be heard. If you were to believe this class of men, there is no patriotism nor honesty in the world but their own.

From many speeches made in reference to Ireland and her wrongs, in these latter times, one would imagine that all love of country was completely absorbed by an unimportant fraction of the whole people, while to my certain knowledge, and to the honor of Ireland be it said, that there are millions in that country unconnected with secret societies, including the whole Catholic Episcopacy and Priesthood, who, unlike them, have not produced a single traitor nor informer for centuries, and who are now, as they ever were, infinitely more reliable in the hour of danger, as every Irishman well knows. The money of Britain did not buy them for centuries, nor are they purchasable to the present hour. They are now ready as ever to sacrifice even life itself if their principles were assailed, or if any really solid advantages were to be acquired thereby for poor Ireland. Notwithstanding all clamor to the contrary, the masses of the population in that country, and her whole priesthood, yield to no class of men in their undying love for fatherland, and are, in the religious as in the patriotic view, still sound to the core. As a people, still clinging with unwavering tenacity to their religion, country, and institutions, they present to the eye of the unbiassed observer the proudest national spectacle on earth. Small in extent of territory, and still smaller in her resources and in the number of her population, Ireland, amid the storms of ages, and after seven hundred years of subjection to another land, still holds her own, and exhibits a national and distinctive vitality at the present day, not certainly surpassed by any of the larger and more favored countries of Europe.

In this land of our adoption, we enjoy many advantages denied to her; and we will be happy and privileged beyond measure, if, avoiding mutual jealousies and schisms, the only marplot that have made Ireland a temporal prey to her enemies,

we imitate all the glorious virtues for which her children have ever been distinguished.

History proclaims the undeniable truth that discord among the Irish themselves has been at all ages the great radical cause of our national misfortunes. And oh, it were well if this scathing malediction of Cain had not followed us to this side of the Atlantic. There is probably not a State, nor a Province, nor a large city, at either side of the British American line, where the demon of Irish feuds is not visibly at work. People of other nationalities have their fights and personal disagreements, but when the enemy or stranger approaches, like skirmishers in a well-drilled army, they instinctively quit their isolation and fall back forthwith on the main body, ever presenting an unbroken front and a serried phalanx to the foe. Would, I say, that in this country of bright hopes we could get rid of this one great national drawback, and imitate at an humble distance the English, the French, the Scotch, and the Americans, in agreeing to differ on minor points, but to be ever blended together as one man in essentials; and then we would make our mark in this country, and in its legislature, and would intellectually, socially, and politically, yield to no others in the land.

At the inauguration of the New Dominion, the time has come for shaking off in earnest this degrading "badge of all our tribe." Let us no longer listen to the voice of blinding passion, but act in public and private affairs as thinking and reasoning human beings, vindicating our own views as best we can, and making all charitable allowances for others. Let us have honorable ambition; yes! but let us be moderate and modest in our pretensions; let us never be foremost nor in each others way where public position and the loaves and fishes are concerned. Let us never be guilty of the unpardonable crime of splitting up for personal ends our own people, who are but one-seventh in number and not one-fifteenth, perhaps, in influence, of the whole population, and who through their own fault solely are well nigh powerless as they can be. Let us hear no more of Irish faction fights and degrading feuds where the stranger is sure to come in (as always happens) and gobble up what of right belongs to us. Before committing ourselves to an

internecine war against brothers, let us in all cases of dispute leave the arbitrament of our pretensions to the decision of the majority called together for this purpose beforehand, and bow down to the behests of the many, rather than sacrifice all to self and to the sordid impulses of petty passions; and then, indeed, we will be in a more favored position in this country than Irishmen ever attained elsewhere. All we ask is fair play, and civil, religious and political equality among our fellow countrymen of other castes and creeds. In the true spirit of freedom and genuine christianity we seek no more and will take no less.

Hoping earnestly that Thomas D'Arcy McGee and no one else will be first in the foremost rank of our much-needed friends to proclaim these principles and do battle for us in the Commons House of the New Dominion of Canada,

I am, dear sir, with best wishes,

Your obedient servant,

† THOMAS L. CONNOLLY,
Archbishop of Halifax.

HENRY J. CLARK, Esq., Q. C., Montreal.